

Hold Your Own Event

By Christy Gammage,
Practice Makes Pawfect



We engage in our hobby for fun. But once you become proficient, you may want to test your skills in an official competition. These shows, trials, or events are usually sanctioned by some national organization and involve lots of people, money, and travel. However, participating in a recognized event is quite different than taking lessons and practicing at home. If you are lucky, you may be able to practice at smaller/local non-sanctioned events, such as Fun Runs, Matches, Play Days, ... or maybe not. If there is nothing around you that will give you the 'event' experience, what about putting together your own mini-event and inviting friends and other local enthusiasts?

The first thing to consider is where you can hold your event. For dog agility, a decent size back yard would be enough. For other sports, you may need to see if your instructor or other friends have a suitable space and talk them into hosting something. Another option is to use a public space in an informal manner. Take equipment to a park or commercial area (where you have permission). Renting a public area, ring or facility could even be cost

effective if you pool money with friends. Word of warning: do not charge others any money to participate as that opens a whole can of worms about insurance and liability. Don't forget to plan for the amount of parking you will need as well.

What if you don't have enough equipment or supplies? Pooling resources with other would-be participants might give you all the obstacles you need for a realistic event practice.

The next thing to plan is what 'classes' you want to offer. Just having friends over to practice, while fun, does not give you the same feel as an event. Try to offer more than one thing. If you can accommodate different skill levels, you can encourage more people to participate. Have a schedule, even if it is very informal. Example: "We'll start at 4pm with an XYZ class, then we will do ABC and end with 123." If parking is an issue, you could stagger when people attend.

Start small. Pick a date that 4-6 invited people can commit to. Keep the event limited to only an hour or two. If you can, have things set up the day before. At rented or public places, you will need to add setup/teardown time to your schedule. Enlist a friend or two to help with setup & teardown.

When the event start time arrives, plan on being the master of ceremonies to keep things going. Have a way to display the event 'schedule' which can include the order of classes and order of participants if needed. This can be as simple as a piece of paper on a table or pinned up somewhere.

Once you have held an event for just a few people, evaluate how it went and what to change for the next time. Need more parking? Toilets? Are there easier ways to

do things? Was it too casual, do you need it to be more like a 'real' event to get any benefit? Ask the participants for feedback (and accept any criticism gracefully). Revamp and schedule another. Keep the goal in mind and stated for the participants, so they know what to expect.

If done well, word might get out and your mini-event may grow organically. If you need more 'advertising' to get participants, use email for targeted invites or Facebook for a more open invitation. Holding your own mini-event can be an effective way to bridge the gap between just practicing your skills vs. practicing to participate in a sanctioned event. And we all want to do Better Practicing!



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